United Nations S/PV.3972

Security Council

Fifty-fourth Year

Provisional

3972nd Meeting

Thursday, 28 January 1999, 11.50 a.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Amorim	(Brazil)
Members:	Argentina	Mr. Petrella
	Bahrain	Mr. Buallay
	Canada	Mr. Duval
	China	Mr. Chen Xu
	France	Mr. Dejammet
	Gabon	Mr. Dangue Réwaka
	Gambia	Mr. Jagne
	Malaysia	Mr. Hasmy
	Namibia	Mr. Andjaba
	Netherlands	Mr. van Walsum
	Russian Federation	Mr. Lavrov
	Slovenia	Mr. Türk
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Richmond
	United States of America	Ms. Soderberg

Agenda

The situation in Georgia

Report of the Secretary-General concerning the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia (S/1999/60)

99-85058 (E)

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The meeting was called to order at 11.50 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in Georgia

Report of the Secretary-General concerning the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia (S/1999/60)

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): I should like to inform the Council that I have received letters from the representatives of Georgia and Germany in which they request to be invited to participate in the discussion of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite those representatives to participate in the discussion, without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Menagarishvili (Georgia) took a seat at the Council table; Mr. Kastrup (Germany) took the seat reserved for him at the side of the Council Chamber.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them the report of the Secretary-General concerning the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, document S/1999/60.

Members of the Council also have before them document S/1999/79, which contains the text of a draft resolution submitted by France, Germany, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the United States of America.

I should like to draw the attention of the members of the Council to document S/1999/71, which contains the text of a letter dated 25 January 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Georgia to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council.

I welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia, His Excellency Mr. Irakli Menagarishvili, and invite him to make his statement.

Mr. Menagarishvili (Georgia): It has not been so long since last July, when I had the opportunity to address the Security Council with regard to the situation in Abkhazia, Georgia.

The current development of events compels me to take the floor today for the same purpose. But at the outset, let me reiterate our deep sympathy and gratitude to the United Nations, in particular to the Secretary-General and to his Special Representative, as well as to the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General and to each and every member of the Council. Their continued support and efforts in support of peace in Abkhazia, Georgia, are truly invaluable.

As I mentioned before, despite our joint efforts to reach a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict, the peace process is increasingly resembling a closed circuit, and the present situation offers anything but optimism.

Our concern and scepticism are based on the fruitless and protracted round of negotiations of the past six months. Here I wish to bring to the Council's attention the traditional practice that has emerged in the course of these negotiations — a practice designed to mislead the international community.

As a rule, such meetings tend to reach their peak right before the meetings of the Security Council or other important forums on Abkhazia, Georgia. At that point, with a surprising promptness, there pops up some absurd and unrealistic initiative, the sole purpose of which is to create an illusion about the progress in the peace process.

But every such "initiative" disappears into oblivion until the next important forum on Georgia convenes. All this has assumed the character of a worrisome tradition, which should be noted by the international community and be dealt with in the appropriate manner.

The recent proposal of the leader of the separatists, Mr. Ardzinba, regarding the unilateral decision of the Abkhaz side to repatriate refugees and displaced persons, is clearly one of the kind of "initiatives" I mentioned above. This decision was announced after the Abkhaz side caused the breakdown of the scheduled meeting between President Shevardnadze and Mr. Ardzinba,

where the documents on the repatriation of refugees and displaced persons and on the maintenance of the ceasefire and the economic rehabilitation of the region were supposed to have been signed.

This so-called initiative was also doomed. On 23 January 1999, at a meeting of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Georgia, the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General and Mr. Ardzinba, the latter rejected the document on the repatriation of refugees and displaced persons. I believe this fact is one more illustration of the obstructive policy of the Abkhaz side.

The starting of the Geneva process was a true victory for all its participants and for the parties to the conflict. My Government remains confident that the Geneva framework is the key mechanism of the peace process. But I have to repeat myself: due to the intransigence of the Abkhaz side, the Geneva meetings have so far not yielded tangible results.

The October 1998 Athens meeting of the Georgian and Abkhaz sides on confidence-building measures was also a success, insofar as it was the largest and most representative meeting since the end of the war. Therefore, we pay homage to the Governments of Greece, Turkey, Ukraine and others and express our appreciation for their readiness to support the follow-up dialogue of the parties.

Regrettably, the Athens meeting was no exception, given its outcome. The participants, including the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General, witnessed how the Abkhaz side reduced the documents of the meeting to the level of a vague declaration of intentions.

The systematic and outright obstruction of the peace process by the Abkhaz side raises a question: how long will the Georgian side, the refugees and the international community wait for the "kindness" of the Abkhaz side to start the constructive dialogue? Or can we remain content with the status quo in the region, maintained at the expense of fruitless negotiations?

Such a status quo is just an illusion. The fact is that, despite the pretended lull, the situation in the region is getting worse in all aspects. The political, socio-economic and criminal situation is catastrophic. Despite Georgia's efforts, the living conditions of the refugees and displaced persons are nothing less than tragic. All this definitely increases tension in the country and threatens the peace and security of the whole Caucasus region.

The continuation of the conflict in Abkhazia only serves the interests of certain political forces and clearly exemplifies the clash of values. On the one hand, there is the ethnocratic regime, the foundation of which is political ambitions and criminal interests. On the other hand, there is the country that has chosen the road of democratic development and aspires to create the acceptable model for the peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups within one unified State.

All this creates the impression that the international community is still inclined to classify existing conflicts as either "first rate" conflicts or "less important" ones, with the former enjoying the maximum concentration of efforts and the latter, due to lack of attention, turning into "frozen" ones. Such "frozen" conflicts pose a threat to the international community and deplete its human and material resources without mitigating the suffering of the people affected.

Worrisome examples of this have clearly emerged during the last six months in Abkhazia, Georgia. Since the tragic events of May 1998, the extermination of the Georgian population and violence against the returnees in Abkhazia, particularly in the Gali region, have not ended. The punitive operations by the so-called Abkhaz militia against the peaceful civilians, carried out under the pretext of curbing terrorism, are ongoing. Moreover, assaults on the Georgian villages of the neighbouring Zugdidi region from the territory controlled by the separatist regime have become systematic. More importantly, during this period of time, the Abkhaz side has employed all the power in its hands to stall the process of the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes and has violated every article of the May 1998 protocol in this regard.

In his recent address to the members of the Security Council, President Shevardnadze put forward a number of proposals aimed at shaping the future actions of the international community with regard to the resolution of the conflict. Let me reiterate our firm belief that the family of nations should be more outspoken and demanding. It should strictly indicate that the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes is not a favour, but rather their fundamental right under international law, and that the responsibility for violating that right should rest with the Abkhaz side.

We believe that the time has come for the Security Council to consider seriously the question of the ethnic cleansing committed by the Abkhaz side against the

Georgian population. The peace process has already reached the phase at which its further development will be impossible without an unbiased approach and the appropriate evaluation of the activities of the separatist regime.

It is also necessary to recall the decisions of the Budapest and Lisbon summits of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) regarding the situation in Georgia, which stressed the unacceptability of demographic changes by means of force. The international community should also warn the Abkhaz side that further attempts to obstruct the return of refugees and displaced persons to their homes will be viewed as a continuation of the policy of ethnic cleansing and might well prompt the Security Council to employ relevant Articles of the Charter of the United Nations and bring those responsible to justice.

My Government is gravely concerned at the security conditions in the conflict zone. Unfortunately, there is no doubt that under its current mandate the peacekeeping operation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) has already exhausted itself. Since last May, the Georgian side has been opposed to the extension of the mandate of the CIS peacekeeping forces unless it reflects the realistic objectives provided in the decisions of the numerous summits of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Due to the lack of proper security conditions, the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) is also failing to discharge its functions fully. This factor seriously affects the activities of the United Nations in the conflict zone and threatens the situation in the region as a whole. Georgia has always supported the deployment of a self-protection unit in the zone of conflict. The present realities indicate that UNOMIG cannot function adequately without the introduction of such a unit.

We should also stress the worrisome fact that the question of the comprehensive demining measures in the region is still unresolved. This affects the activities of international personnel and threatens the lives of peaceful civilians.

I wish to underscore that safeguards for peace and security are part of the political process in dealing with armed conflicts, including the one in Abkhazia, Georgia. Proceeding from this understanding, the time has come to strengthen the political component in the activities of UNOMIG.

Neither bilateral nor trilateral negotiations have yielded results with regard to the definition of the political status of Abkhazia within Georgia. Under these circumstances, the United Nations should not limit itself to just reaffirming the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia. Together with the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General, it should elaborate proposals for a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia, and submit them to the parties for consideration.

We believe that the Security Council should once again reaffirm the right of all refugees and displaced persons to return safely to their homes, without preconditions and with adequate security safeguards. We also believe that it is necessary for the United Nations — together with the OSCE and the Group of Friends of the Secretary-General — to work out the mechanism to start this process.

It is necessary to consider during the initial phase of settlement the creation of a provisional administration under international control that has the widest participation of returnees in self-governing and law enforcement bodies. We support the idea of giving a special status to returnees, lest they should become hostage to political games and ambitions.

We believe that the Security Council should take note of the decisions adopted at the December 1998 OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Oslo, which offer principal provisions with regard to the conflict settlement in Abkhazia, Georgia, and call for a strengthening of the cooperation between the United Nations and OSCE.

One of the most important criteria of UNOMIG's activities should become its effective monitoring of the CIS peacekeeping operation. Therefore, relevant measures should be taken to that effect.

I think the Security Council should welcome the bilateral dialogue between the parties, as well as the creation and functioning of joint investigative groups, with a view to investigating the violations of agreements reached. The Security Council should also express readiness to promote, within its capacity, the region's economic rehabilitation, in accordance with the progress reached in the peace process.

The Government of Georgia expresses its full readiness to cooperate with the United Nations and with the international community as a whole in order to

achieve the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Abkhazia, Georgia. This is the only acceptable way for all of us, but we are confident that some decisive steps should also be taken on the road to peace. This is the wish and expectation of the Georgian people and of the international community. Let me therefore express the hope that the Council will give serious consideration to our suggestions and that it will arrive at the relevant decision.

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): It is my understanding that the Security Council is ready to proceed to the vote on the draft resolution (S/1999/79) before it. If I hear no objection, I shall put the draft resolution to the vote now.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

A vote was taken by show of hands.

In favour:

Argentina, Bahrain, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Gabon, Gambia, Malaysia, Namibia, Netherlands, Russian Federation, Slovenia, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America

The President (*interpretation from Spanish*): There were 15 votes in favour. The draft resolution has been adopted unanimously as resolution 1225 (1999).

There are no further speakers inscribed on my list. The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 12.10 p.m.